

**ARIZONA GAME AND FISH DEPARTMENT
HERITAGE DATA MANAGEMENT SYSTEM**

Animal Abstract

Element Code: ABPAE52040

Data Sensitivity: No

CLASSIFICATION, NOMENCLATURE, DESCRIPTION, RANGE

NAME: *Tyrannus crassirostris*

COMMON NAME: Thick-billed Kingbird; Swainson Thick-billed Kingbird; Madrugador Pico Grueso (Hispanic).

SYNONYMS:

FAMILY: Tyrannidae

AUTHOR, PLACE OF PUBLICATION: Swainson, 1826.

TYPE LOCALITY:

TYPE SPECIMEN:

TAXONOMIC UNIQUENESS: One of eleven species in the genus *Tyrannus*.

DESCRIPTION: A relatively stocky flycatcher, with a large head and heavy, long bill. Average length of 9-9.5 in (23-24 cm). The upperparts are generally brownish (tinged olive in fresh plumage), with a noticeably darker facial mask. The yellow crown patch is rarely visible on the brown cap. The chin and throat is white, grading into pale gray on the chest. Belly is pale yellow, brighter yellow in postbreeding autumn plumage. The tail is long, dark gray and slightly notched; wingbars are nonexistent. Bristles at the base of the bill, is visible as with other flycatchers. (AGFD 1991; Farrand, Jr. 1988). Immatures have brighter yellow from breast to tail (Farrand, Jr. 1988); upperparts browner than adults (USGS 2001).

AIDS TO IDENTIFICATION: Other yellow-bellied kingbirds have shorter, thinner bills, gray crowns, and olive backs, rather than the brown upperparts of the Thick-billed (Farrand, Jr. 1988).

ILLUSTRATIONS: Color photos (Farrand, Jr. 1988: p. 402)
Color drawing (National Geographic 1999: p. 301)

TOTAL RANGE: Occurs from southeastern Arizona and extreme southwestern New Mexico southward through western Mexico to northern Guatemala, with northern populations being summer residents only (A.O.U. 1983 in BISON 2000).

RANGE WITHIN ARIZONA: Breeds locally in sycamore riparian habitats at Sonoita Creek (near Patagonia), Sycamore Canyon (Atascosa Mountains), and Guadalupe Canyon

(east of Douglas). Since 1980, they also nest locally in cottonwood-willow gallery forests along lower San Pedro River, from Cascabel to Dudleyville. A few individuals have wintered along the Colorado River near Parker and Laguna Dam. (AGFD in prep).

SPECIES BIOLOGY AND POPULATION TRENDS

BIOLOGY: Like other tyrant flycatchers, the thick-billed kingbird is notably bold and aggressive, often attacking raptors straying near their territories. Their call is a loud, forceful and shrill *weeeeer!*, *Brr-zee!* or *kit-a-ree!* Other calls reported include a loud, high, whistled *puareet* (National Geographic 1999), and an authoritative *jhu-wheer* and *jhu-weet* (Farrand, Jr. 1988). It hunts from an exposed branch, making short flights out to catch its prey, then usually returning to the same perch. As it pursues something, it snaps its large bill quite audibly. (AGFD 1991).

REPRODUCTION: The thick-bill arrives on its Arizona breeding grounds in late spring or early summer, where it builds a flimsy nest of grasses and small twigs high in a sycamore or cottonwood. Eight nests monitored by Baltosser (1980 in BISON 2000) were 10.5-18.0 m above the ground in Arizona sycamore (*Platanus wrightii*) trees. Both sexes incubate the single clutch of 3-4 eggs. Eggs are white, spotted with brown. Very little is known about the specifics of this species' breeding biology.

FOOD HABITS: Preys almost exclusively on invertebrates, mostly flying insects.

HABITAT: Deciduous riparian woodlands in semi-arid canyons, between 3000 and 6500 feet elevation. Most breeding and nest records in Arizona are from mixed groves of sycamores and cottonwoods, while adjoining slopes are covered by oak-pine woodland or mesquite-grassland. (AGFD 1991).

ELEVATION: In Arizona, ranges from 2,100 - 4,300 ft (641 - 1312 m).

PLANT COMMUNITY: In Arizona, breeds in sycamore riparian habitats dominated by cottonwood, willow and mesquite. Locally common in cottonwood-willow gallery forests along the lower San Pedro River (AGFD in prep in BISON 2000).

POPULATION TRENDS: Unknown. A rare bird that was first discovered in the United States in 1958, the range of this Mexican species has expanded northward since the middle of the 20th century (USGS 1998).

SPECIES PROTECTION AND CONSERVATION

ENDANGERED SPECIES ACT STATUS:
STATE STATUS:

None
WC (WSCA, AGFD in prep)

OTHER STATUS:

[Candidate, TNW, AGFD 1988]
Bureau of Land Management Sensitive
(USDI, BLM AZ 2008)

MANAGEMENT FACTORS: **Threats:** degradation and loss of native riparian habitat through overgrazing, wood-cutting, fire, stream diversion, and groundwater depletion.
Management needs: reduce riparian grazing to maintain and enhance sycamore and cottonwood regeneration; reduce diversion and groundwater withdrawal to maintain perennial stream flow.

PROTECTIVE MEASURES TAKEN:

SUGGESTED PROJECTS: Better knowledge of its distribution, natural history, abundance and population trends are needed.

LAND MANAGEMENT/OWNERSHIP: USFS - Coronado National Forest; USFWS - Buenos Aires NWR; BLM - Guadalupe Canyon ACEC; TNC - Patagonia-Sonoita Creek; State Land Department; City of Patagonia; Private.

SOURCES OF FURTHER INFORMATION**REFERENCES:**

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- USGS, Northern Prairie Wildlife Research Center. 1998. Forest and Rangeland Birds of the United States, Natural History and Habitat Use: Thick-billed Kingbird – *Tyrannus crassirostris*. <http://www.npwrc.usgs.gov/resource/1998/forest/species/tyracras.htm>.
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OTHER REFERENCES:

Zimmerman, D.A. 1960. Thick-billed Kingbird Nesting in New Mexico. reprinting from The AUK, Vol. 77, p. 92-94.

The Birds of Arizona: Thick-billed Kingbird - *Tyrannus crassirostris* Swainson.

MAJOR KNOWLEDGEABLE INDIVIDUALS:

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION:

Tyrannus crassirostris, from the Latin *tyrannus* for ruler or monarch, *crassus* for “thick” and *rostrum* for “beak.”

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